



# IMPROVING MAINE'S INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SYSTEM

Choosing a Fair and Reliable Needs Assessment Tool  
is a Key Step

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## Introduction

Maine does not currently use a nationally validated assessment tool to ensure that the needs of adults in its Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) system are identified fairly and accurately. Without such a tool, Maine lacks a reliable picture of the range and types of supports required by individuals served. This constrains system planning efforts, both regarding expanding existing service models and developing innovations. For example, stakeholders have identified tiered shared living as an innovation that would enable individuals with a broader range of needs to choose shared living. The Department supports the concept, but to design the tiers, standardized information is needed from many individuals to create a reliable composite picture of the people who are supported by the system.

### Step One: Selecting a Tool

Early in 2021, the Department, in consultation with stakeholders and supported by a nationally recognized research firm (the Human Services Research Institute, HSRI) reviewed 14 assessment tools in use around the country. Tools were reviewed with the Department's primary objectives in mind:

- ***Compiling and viewing reliable assessment data in aggregate to better understand the needs of individuals served.*** Ideally, needs assessment results will show the range of support needs across individuals. Combined with demographic information, this data helps the agency to understand services needed across Maine, age groups, and other groupings of people to better describe who needs what services in the present and over the lifespan.
- ***Informing program innovation to respond more effectively to support needs over time.*** The assessment data generated, especially when used with other information, can inform the design of service innovations currently under consideration, such as tiered shared living, consumer-directed services and a Lifespan Waiver program.
- ***Improving supports equity.*** Maine's IDD system serves individuals with a very broad range of needs, from those who live independently with occasional supports to those who require support 24 hours per day. Currently, the level of support provided is determined by the person-centered team within the constraints of the specific waiver program or other MaineCare services in which the individual is enrolled, resulting in significant disparities that are based not on need, but on artificial program constraints. By aggregating and analyzing standardized needs data from many individuals supported by the system, the Department can develop support tiers. In the future, the person-centered team would

## OADS MISSION

“TO PROMOTE THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF INDEPENDENCE, HEALTH, AND SAFETY FOR OLDER ADULTS AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGHOUT MAINE”

## OADS VISION

“WE PROMOTE INDIVIDUAL DIGNITY THROUGH RESPECT, CHOICE AND SUPPORT FOR ALL ADULTS”

continue to plan individualized supports, but within a fair and reliably determined tier.

In addition to supporting OADS' policy objectives, the following criteria were used to guide the decision:

- ***Have structure and process that is consistent with contemporary best practice.*** Generally, this implies that the tool follows a “person-centered” format.
- ***Query for sufficient background information.*** This includes sufficient information to identify the individual and provide base demographic data as well as other information pertaining to the respondents.
- ***Be valid for assessing support needs across essential life domains.*** Most succinctly, in this context validity refers to the degree to which an assessment measures what it claims to measure, i.e., support needs, and recognizes that those needs change over time.
- ***Result in reliable scores.*** The assessment yields consistent scores regardless of who is conducting the assessment.
- ***Be constructed in ways to promote easy automation of data entry, aggregation, and scoring.*** A successful assessment initiative must also include a complementing database software platform to gather, manage, and apply the information that is collected.
- ***Be affordable.*** A tool may have great appeal in terms of its capacity for assessing support need, but the range of costs for using an assessment must be considered.

Four finalists were selected: the Functional Assessment Standardized Items (FASI); the Inventory for Client and Agency Planning (ICAP); the international Resident Assessment Instrument (interRAI); and the Supports Intensity Scale (SIS).

Of these four finalists, OADS asked to review how frequently other states chose these tools for implementation.

The **FASI** is a relative newcomer. It was alpha tested in one state in 2015 and beta tested in six other states in 2017 (Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Kentucky, and Minnesota) with a final report issued in 2018. Colorado is utilizing the FASI, although it is presently still using the SIS-A and is developing its own assessment tool.

The **ICAP** has limited use currently. South Dakota uses it to set residential reimbursement tiers. In West Virginia, ICAP results are used to inform supports level structure and an algorithm to allocate resources. The ICAP is also used in Alabama and Nebraska.

The **interRAI** is used in other states in different ways, as there are separate modules that are used for distinct populations. The Home Care module is used in 21 states for older adults and individuals with physical disabilities. The Intellectual or Developmental Disability module is used by two states, as is the behavioral health module called “Community Mental Health”.

The **Supports Intensity Scale** (SIS) is used in the following seventeen States.

Colorado	Maryland	Rhode Island
Georgia	Michigan	Tennessee
Hawaii	New Hampshire	Vermont
Idaho	North Carolina	Virginia
Iowa	North Dakota	Washington
Kentucky	Pennsylvania	

**Stakeholder Feedback:**

We received the following comments on the four tools from stakeholders which further guided the selection process.

- Assessors need to be respectful and knowledgeable about people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism.
- To create a more positive experience, the assessment should focus on a strengths-based approach (what the person *can* do) and the supports needed to be successful in each activity.
- The assessment should be included as one source of information among others to create a person-centered plan for services.
- Gathering information from those who know the person well is important to understand the support a person needs at home, in the community, or at work.
- If necessary, an additional assessment or process should be used to capture a person’s unique or extraordinary support needs.
- Some supports are proactive or preventative and the assessment should capture this type of support need.
- Understanding how OADS plans to use the information from the assessment tool is important.
- Clear communication during this process is key.

**Conclusion:**

The Department determined that the FASI and ICAP do not adequately meet the Department’s policy objectives, have less experience associated with them and would require more time to implement at a higher cost. The interRAI was determined to be a workable option for assessing support need, but it has shortcomings tied to its substance and structure, as well as the lack of rigorous assessor training (for reliability) and a complementing database platform to support analysis.

The SIS was determined to be best suited to meet OADS’ needs. It covers a wide scope of support needs, provides summative scale scores tied to Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs), includes items that emphasize contemporary community life, offers comprehensive training for assessors, and makes available a web-based database platform to gather and manage assessment results. It also is widely in use by IDD programs across the country, creating a community of practice for participating states.

**Next Steps:**

The Department intends to implement the SIS over the next several years, with the goal of completing an initial round of assessments in 2022. An immediate next step includes the procurement of an independent assessment vendor by Spring 2022 and to start conducting assessments in the spring of 2022.

Once a representative sample of assessments has been collected, the data will be analyzed to begin the development of tiers. The Department intends to introduce tiers gradually, as service innovations are implemented, such as tiered shared living, consumer direction and, ultimately, a Lifespan Waiver program.

For more information, visit the Needs Assessment Implementation Project webpage on the OADS website: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/oads/about-us/initiatives/needs-assessment-implementation-project>

Or contact OADS at: [OADS.NAproject@maine.gov](mailto:OADS.NAproject@maine.gov)